



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

February 3, 2004

The Honorable Alex Deccio, Chair
Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee
213A Irv Newhouse Building
Post Office Box 40414
Olympia, Washington 98504-0414

Dear Senator Deccio,

As you know, the state Board of Health is a long time supporter of universal access to critical health services. This is a set of services determined by public and private payers and consumers to be proven effective at preventing, treating or mitigating the effects of a wide range of health conditions. The weight of the evidence the Board reviewed to develop this recommendation suggests that these services begin with a stable and adequately funded public health infrastructure to support disease surveillance and reporting, health emergency response, infectious disease control, health education, social and environmental health interventions and personal health services that immunize, screen for common diseases, treat illness early and manage chronic illness effectively. These services include behavioral health interventions to prevent and treat obesity, smoking, alcohol abuse, addictions to other dangerous drugs, mental illness, and diseases of the teeth and gums.

We recognize that rampant inflation in the cost of some medical care is forcing cutbacks in any health care subsidies at all for some people by public and private payers alike. What is more, we are now seeing systematic efforts to cut back on coverage for many of the most effective health interventions, even if some modicum of "health insurance" remains. We believe no one should be without these critical health services, and that it makes no public health sense to exclude some from coverage for any service at all, even as we extend relatively comprehensive coverage for questionably effective services to others. We have detailed this position in several documents available on our website at www.sboh.wa.gov. Please choose "Priority Projects" and "Access to Critical Health Services." A summary of our position on these issues, developed in concert with the Washington State Public Health Association, is attached.

To the extent that SB 6551 will begin to reverse the inequities in subsidies for Washington residents and to the extent it will reverse the cutbacks in proven health services for our population we support it.

More specifically we support Section 301 of SB 6551 calling for Health Care Cost Containment and Quality Improvement Study. We applaud the study's emphasis on improving the quality and effectiveness of the health care system through increased focus upon evidence-based medicine,

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proven preventive health services, management of chronic disease, decreasing health disparities between racial and ethnic groups, increasing the relative efficiency with which care is delivered, and consolidation of existing state programs to achieve efficiencies where possible. These themes reflect many of the Board's guiding principles in recent years. We are pleased to have been named to the group of advisors who will help shape this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Linda Lake, M.B.A.
Chair, Washington State Board of Health



Thomas Locke, M.D., M.P.H.
Vice Chair, Washington State Board of
Health

Enclosure

cc: Senate Health and Long Term Care Committee
Washington State Board of Health Members
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Office of Health Policy
Ree Sailors, Governor's Office of Health Policy
Steve Meyer, Department of Health